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ABSTRACT

Presenting autobiographical stories from Hispanic culture and history, especially the stories of fascinating, historic role models can be beneficial, educational, therapeutic, and empowering for presenters and audiences. This paper is divided into two sections. Section (1) discusses in detail presenting such autobiographical stories and how to develop a script for presentation. It states that effective presenters of autobiographical stories are skillful empathetic storytellers whose work is particularly well suited and cost effective for use in distance learning, video programming, television, and broadcast journalism. Section (2) presents a script about the life of Eva Peron, the young wife of Argentina's president during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Juan Peron, and based on her autobiography, "Evita by Evita." The paper explains that Eva died of cancer on July 26, 1952, at the age of 33. (BT)

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PRESENTING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STORIES FROM HISPANIC CULTURE AND HISTORY: *EVA PERON, SINNER OR SAINT?*

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Presenting Autobiographical Stories from Hispanic Culture and History

Diane Howard

Presenting autobiographical stories from Hispanic culture and history, especially the stories of fascinating, historic role models can be beneficial, educational, therapeutic, and empowering for presenters and audiences. It can facilitate valuable insights, techniques, and skills for presenters and audience members. First, it encourages a close study of Hispanic or Latino history and aggressive research from first-hand sources. Further, presentations of autobiography, which focus on internal, subjective issues, require careful study of character, crafted skills of writing, perceptive consideration of non-verbal communication, attentive study of voice, careful selection of appropriate performance frames, and effective engagement of audiences. Finally, presentations of autobiography over videoconference or web-casting equipment provide doors of opportunity for widespread Hispanic education and influence as presenters communicate in empathetic ways to multiple distance audiences over cameras via videoconference networks or the internet.

One-person, Hispanic, autobiographical stories can be presented to distance audiences, as well as to onsite audiences in theatres, museums, schools, churches etc. They can be presented to audiences in educational, performing arts, cultural, historical, civic organizations and so forth. Presenters begin the process of producing one-person, autobiographical presentations by choosing historic characters, displaying fascinating, multi-faceted, paradoxical, or ironic characteristics. The presenters look for characters who struggle with universal issues and who significantly develop over time. They look for characters whose stories reflect universal truths. Often, these characters are pioneers who struggle with and overcome sociological and cultural barriers. Performers of autobiographical stories look for ethnically diverse characters. Finally, they look for characters with whom they can bond empathetically.

Once the presenters find fascinating, multi-dimensional, historic Hispanic or Latino characters, they study the historical settings of the characters and their personal writings, such as their autobiographies, diaries, journals, and other writings, which reflect the truth about the characters' real natures and struggles. Sometimes close, second-hand sources, such as interviews and

biographies, by writers who know the characters personally, provide interesting insights. These close sources enable the autobiographical performers to reveal real, human dimensions of the characters. As the presenters develop understanding of the characters, they are able to begin to develop a script.

Scripts are driven, created, and built out of empathy with characters. Presenter/scriptwriters can develop scenes with emotional impact, after they have listened to and understood the characters. Writers of presentations of autobiography incorporate words and the communication style of the historic characters, which gives the language of the scripts uniqueness, color, and intensity. Further, since "character is action," as stated by Eugene O'Neil, dramatic action comes through conflict and desire in characters. The writing of scripts begins with conflicts, related to the characters' wants, which are counteracted. The opening scene prepares the audience for what is to come. What is to come is foreshadowed. The focus is always on the character. The presenter of an autobiographical story develops a script, which enables the character to show his or her struggles. The script is written for action. The presenter is careful with dialogue in her or his writing of a script. She or he must know where the problem or tension is

for the character. The scriptwriter may write brief narrations, which can inform the audience; but primarily he or she writes scenes, which visually show the struggles of the character.

These scenes are ones of crisis and significant action. The script is a structured work of art, which includes a beginning, foreshadowing, discovery, incidents, crisis, and denouement. Each scene has rising action, a climax, and falling action. The entire performance also has rising action, a climax, and falling action. Being character-driven, the script enables the character to speak for himself or herself and to reveal his or her subtext through action. The motives, objectives, desires, or wants of the character are at the center of the performance. The performer/scriptwriter knows what is at stake for the character. And the stakes must be high. The audience is more engaged when the stakes are high. The scriptwriter knows the point of view of the character. She or he reveals this about the character by the way the character expresses her or his thoughts and by action. The script reveals the answers to the dramatistic questions: Who am I? What do I want? Where am I? Why am I here? When is this taking place? What is my physical life? What are the stakes? How badly do I want this? The presenter/writer reveals the conflicts of the character with nature,

himself or herself, and with others. These conflicts are revealed through non-verbal and verbal communication. The presenter must consider the internal conflicts, desires, motivations, interpretations of the characters and narrators, personae, as well as external issues such non-verbal communication, visualization of the personae, pantomimic dramatization, and interaction between personae and the audience.

In writing a script, autobiographical presenters must consider non-verbal communication dimensions such as kinesics, proxemics, tactile communication, and object language, especially in the communication of the subtext of personae. Presenters of autobiography must consider how the personae will reveal themselves through gestures, movement, posture, facial expressions and so forth. Presenters must consider how the personae's use of relational and environmental space will reveal their conflicts, desires, and motivations. They need to consider how the personae would reveal themselves through touch and handling of objects. Presenters must consider what the physical appearance of the personae should be and how it will reveal them. They must consider how the personae would use physical business, activity and movement to reveal their subtext and relationships

with other personae and the audience. The presenter of autobiography must carefully also plan costumes, props, and set and analyze how these will reveal the personae.

Characters react to their worlds according to their interpretation of events. The interpretations of the characters are revealed through their bodies, as well as through their voices. The writing of the language of the script depends on the voice of the characters and narrators. If the script is to include a narrative voice, the presenter may write a scene from the third person point-of-view. This narration would include language, which is written to tell or to describe rather than to show. The language of the narration would be written in complete sentences, which may be longer than high context, fragmentary phrases of dramatic scenes. The narrative scene could be written to go backward in time, rather than to be performed in the present. As well as the point-of-view of the personae in their scripts, presenters of autobiography must consider many other aspects of voice in the personae in scenes they write. They must consider the historic period, the culture, the status, the education, the dialects, the geography, the physical surroundings, the health, and the credibility of the personae, for example. Of the voice of the personae, the autobiographical

presenter must consider if the form of the voice is literary, ceremonial, conversational and so forth. The presenter must also consider the relationship of the voice of each scene with the audience, that is whether or not the voice in the scene is closed or open in nature to the audience.

Frames of scenes determine the relationship of the personae with the audience. Thus, the form of the script depends on the frames of the scenes. Autobiographical presenters use three categories of scenic frames: lyric, dramatic, and epic. The lyric scene is a private scene in which the character is alone revealing his or her thoughts aloud as he or she thinks aloud, prays, speaks to himself or herself in a mirror, speaks aloud while writing in a journal or diary and so forth. The character in the lyric mode uses high-context language. That is, he or she speaks in a kind of shorthand or fragmented way. Dramatic scenes in which the character speaks to another very familiar person can also be high-context. The character in dramatic mode can speak subtly through negotiation, manipulation, or implication with someone he or she imagines on the stage, speaks to offstage, or speaks to as a character in the audience. The script uses low-context language with clear, complete sentences in narration in the epic mode, that

of the storyteller. The frames of each scene establish the performer's relationship to the audience.

One-person performance of Hispanic autobiography can incorporate some interesting interactions with the audience. The reflective lyric frame provides the most private, vulnerable mode for the performer as character; however it closes off the performer as character from a relationship with the audience. The audience views the scene through the imaginary fourth wall. However, the performer as a lyric character can move through the audience without acknowledging them. The conversational dramatic mode, in which the performer as character interacts with a specific other, also is closed in relationship to the audience as a whole. However, the specific other can be placed in the audience and the performer as character can move through the audience as he or she interacts with the specific other. The presentational epic mode is most open in the relationship of the performer as character and the audience. The epic narrator can move close to the audience. The audience can become a group of characters. The audience can become people in a scene in which the performer as character finds himself or herself in a social situation. Making the audience characters in a social setting in which the performer as character finds himself or

herself can serve to define the character in a social context. Making the audience characters also enables interesting interactions for the audience with the performer. Frames which establish relationships between performer as character and serve to keep the performer as character and the audience in the same place and time strengthens believability in the audience.

Audiences from the various sites of distance, educational, videoconference performances often follow the performances with questions and discussions of significant topics, which are directed to the performer, as his or her self, and other audience members. Often the audience members respond in a vulnerable, transparent way. Many of the comments and questions from audience members are very personally significant. It is almost as if the videoconference configuration encourages an atmosphere of anonymity, which paradoxically encourages questions and discussions which are personal in nature, not unlike the personal questions and discussions among strangers on radio or television talk shows or in internet chat or discussion groups. When performers of autobiography are able to communicate human interest and empathy in highly technological communication arenas, they find that performance and communication over

videoconference equipment can uniquely personalize the performers, the characters performed, and the audience in the communication interaction. Ironically, often the performers, characters, and audience interact more personally, openly, and honestly over videoconference equipment than in onsite performances. Further, both onsite and distance performances often incorporate audio-visual elements such as props used as visual metaphors, archival photographs, film footage, period music, sound effects, and voice-overs, which serve to engage audiences.

Presenters of Hispanic or Latino autobiographical stories can interface their presentations with modern mass communication technology. Corresponding to the revolution in computer technology, there has been an explosion in video technology, such as in the areas of videoconferences, distance learning via video equipment, video-streaming, web-casting, educational videos and so forth. Effective presenters of autobiographical stories are skillful empathetic storytellers. Their work is especially well suited and cost effective for distance learning, video programming, television, and broadcast journalism. The empathetic *high touch* of autobiographical storytelling is especially attractive and engaging

in *high tech* contexts. It is especially suitable in distance learning and communication, where audio-visual aids are critical and where interactive question/answer programming should be incorporated into the teaching in some form.

Researching, writing, and presenting Hispanic or Latino autobiographical stories are uniquely beneficial, educational, therapeutic, and empowering processes for presenters and audience members. These activities encourage understanding, compassion, and empathy. Challenging stereotypical images, they discourage hasty judgments, based on simplistic understandings of others. They present historical truth and social, cultural understanding. Finally, Hispanic or Latino autobiographical stories can have a role modeling effect, which can influence achievement motivation in audience members.

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Eva Peron, Sinner or Saint?

Natalia Trejo

Narrator

In her autobiography *Evita by Evita,* Eva Duarte de Peron unveils her past of illegitimacy and her rise to sainthood. She reveals how her childhood trials led to her greatness as the wife of Juan Peron, the president of Argentina. Some remember her as a saint, others as a cheat and a thief. But who was Evita? Her life began in a small, little pueblo, in a long forgotten, Indian Encampment called Los Toldos. But driven by her dreams and ambitions, this outspoken, young woman made her way to the top of Argentinean society.

SETTING: We are in Eva Peron's private quarters. The stage is set with a small end table on which is a tea set. A comfortable is next to the table. The lights are dim.

AT RISE: Eva, near the end of her life, sits looking at a picture, pondering the past. She has a shawl over head. She steps out of dim light towards DL, approaching the audience, as if they are her confidantes, her friends. She lowers her shawl to her shoulders. Eva is upset, as she remembers sad situations from her past.

I never forgot where I came from, but I also vowed never to return! (Eva steps back, as she remembers her past.) I remember … ? I was just a child … (She looks forward toward DR and points as if she is scolding a child.) You are not a Duarte! You are an Ibarguren! (She speaks to her confidantes.) I was seven years old … it was written on the classroom blackboard. I was confused and wondering why in the world people said that I was not a Duarte. I know … According to Argentine law, I was not only considered as an illegitimate child but as a child born of adultery. My mother was my father's mistress. I was seven years of age when my father died. My brothers and sisters at my father's funeral were refused entrance. The walk behind the legitimate family towards the cemetery seemed far. I, being the youngest of seven, was last in line. This was the moment when I swore to myself that I would one day be the first. (Eva pours herself and a confidante a cup of tea and continues the conversation.) Since I was a child I always wanted to recite. (Eva is enthusiastic, and proud.) It was as though I always wished to tell others something, something great, which I felt deep in my heart.

(Eva puts the shawl aside and speaks to the audience as if they are a group of her friends in another time and place. Eva is feeling healthier. She is happily reminiscent.) My attempt to get closer to high society had failed. In order to become something different from my mother and sisters, I had to leave my town ... my past. I decided to be an actress. (Eva continues sarcastically.) I, Eva Peron, had every *disadvantage* one needs to succeed ... no money, no cash, no father, no bright-lights. I had been nowhere at the age of 16. As the tango singer, Agustin Magaldi, found out, he had the distinction of being the first man to be of use to me. He sang to me; "On this night of a thousand stars let me take you to heaven's doors where the music that love's guitar plays for ever more!"

(Having been stirred up, Eva comically calms herself down. She focuses back on the audience as if they are a group of her friends.) It is true! Men have hurt me! But, I had to pursue a career that took priority in my life. I was passionate and willing to sacrifice anything and everything to reach my goal. Yes, during my artistic career, I chose each and every one of my lovers with specific objectives to get a part. The others, the ones I had to find

when I had no prospects of work served only to allow me enough time to find a new play or film.

(Eva offers several people in the audience a cup of tea and responds with looks and shrugs, as if she accepting each "no-thank-you." She then serves herself, as she continues her story.) On May 1, 1939 I embraced radio soaps of political figures about their personal stories, which were more emotional than ideological. Ever since I can remember, injustices hurt my soul as though something was stabbing it. I had been Peronist well before Peron himself was. (She sighs with a pleasant grin. She finds a place to settle and sits.) When the impact of WWII began to loosen it's grip on our country's government, Argentine men of power began to launch the revolution of the people. As some of them withdrew out of fear, one man led in persisting along that difficult path. That man was Colonel Juan Peron.

(Eva extends her hand to a gentleman in the audience, as if he is Peron. Eva moves seductively around him.) Colonel Peron, I've heard so much about you. (Eva sings as she seeks to seduce Peron.) You must believe … please forgive me if I seem naïve … please understand I'd be good for you … I'm too good to miss … but please understand I'll be good for you … (Eva speaks

again to the audience, as confidantes.) I put myself at his side, as he said that the cause of the people was his own cause. I said that however great the sacrifice I would never leave his side until I died. (Eva sits to rest, breathing heavily, as if after hard labor.) He accepted.

(Eva stands then paces. She picks up a picture, looks at it, ponders it, and caresses it. She speaks with tenderness and pride.) It is said, I lifted him out of the Abyss and organized the worker's revolt that secured his freedom in 1945. This swept him to the presidency a year later and my mesmerizing oratory gave him a second term in office.

I had a double personality. (She puts the picture down and walks up to an audience member.) One, Eva Peron, was the president's wife whose work was simple and agreeable ... a holiday job ... receiving honors at gala performances. (Eva moves to another member of the audience.) The other "Evita" was the wife of the leader of the country, whose people had placed all their faith in him, all their hope and their love. But only the descamisados, the workers, called me "Evita." But men of the government addressed me as "Senora".

(Eva walks UC away from the audience. Her spirit is now declining. Her emotion and power is diminishing. Her voice is still strong but her body projects physical deterioration.) I never imagined that the serious problem between the poor and the rich would one day knock so directly at the door of my heart … claiming my humble efforts for its solution in my country. I am a weak woman after all … I believe firmly that there really exists an unknown force, which prepares men and women for the accomplishment of the particular mission which each of us must perform. (Eva sits in a corner. She is now weakened, showing frustration and sadness. She picks up her diary and begins to read portions of it.) November 3rd 1951 … admitted to the hospital … diagnosed with … malignant tumor on my uterus. May 7th … celebrated my 33rd birthday … weighed only 82lbs. (Eva falls on her knees and sings passionately.) I tried to give as much as I could … the cause of the people was my cause! … what I'd do for a hundred years … the physical interferes … strong heart … body falling apart … (Eva steps DL toward the audience, dramatically expressing pain as she continues to sing. She then speaks.) But don't … Don't cry for me Argentina the truth is I shall not leave you … .I'm Argentina and always will be.

Narrator

On July 26th 1952 Eva Duarte de Peron was pronounced dead. Her memory brought the aged dictator out of exile after 18 years and ironically allowed his new wife to become the first woman president in history.

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